

The Race that was Rigged (A Swazi story)

Tortoise was eating peacefully one day, minding his own business, when along came Mofuli, the hare. Mofuli, like all wicked little hares, could not resist the chance to make fun of Tortoise and tease him about how slow and ponderous he was.

Mofuli, full of mischief, challenged Tortoise to a race. There were some palm trees about 550 yards (500 meters) from where they were, and Mofuli said that was where they would race to.

Tortoise had had enough of Mofuli, and all hares, to last him a lifetime, since this was not the first time he had been teased by one of these irritating creatures. He wished he could put Hare in his place once and for all.

He thought for a moment and then said, "Speed is not everything, Mofuli. We must have endurance, too. Let us make this a real race – a long one. Let us race to the Blue Pan, some six miles (10 kilometers) from here. And, so that I have time to prepare, let us run the race in five days' time, at noon."

Mofuli was most surprised. He hadn't expected Tortoise to accept the challenge and had been looking forward to a good long teasing. But he was scornful, and he almost decided not to bother with the race. But Tortoise was so much in earnest, that in the end he agreed. And Hare went on his way, laughing. He could hardly wait to tell all the other animals about the silly old Tortoise.

But Tortoise lost no time. He called on his relatives for help, telling them about his plan. It was very simple: at noon on Saturday, they were to place themselves in

different positions all along the path that Hare and Tortoise were to race. Every one of them was to run toward Blue Pan, starting from different points along the route. All they had to do was to keep going as fast as they could, until Hare had sped past, and then they could go home and rest if they wanted to.

Tortoise collected a gourd to hold water, and set off for the pan that very day. It took him almost five days to get to Blue Pan, but at last he arrived. At noon on Saturday, he filled his gourd with water and settled down to wait.

Meanwhile, Mofuli had arrived at the starting point at the agreed time, and there he found Tortoise's cousin. It did not occur to Mofuli that this was a different Tortoise. They greeted each other, and the race began.

Mofuli was out of sight in a twinkling, and Tortoise's cousin plodded off on his way, chuckling to himself. Mofuli was laughing too, until he reached the first rises and there was Tortoise ahead of him! (Actually, it was Tortoise's brother, stumbling along as fast as he could go.) Mofuli ran faster and soon he was out of sight. He was rather puzzled, and as the race went on, he became more and more confused.

Over each hill, Mofuli found Tortoise in front of him, each time he overtook him, running like the wind, Tortoise would laugh loudly. By now, Hare was thinking that Tortoise must have learned to fly

It was very hot, being midday, and the sun beat down. The pan was still two miles away, and Mofuli was terribly thirsty. He came over the next rise to find Tortoise, ahead of him again!

In desperation, Mofuli put on his last burst of speed. Heart pounding, he strained every muscle, and at last came

in sight of the Blue Pan. He was almost at the pan, when suddenly he tripped and fell. He lay on the ground, exhausted – he could go no further. His sides were heaving and every limb was trembling.

After a few moments he staggered to his feet. He looked up and what so you think he saw?

Why Tortoise, of coarse, walking towards him from the pan, carrying a gourd of cool, clear water. This sight was more than Mofuli could stand. He fainted from shock and exhaustion.

Tortoise revived hare by sprinkling cool water over his face. When Mofuli came round, Tortoise said in a soothing voice, “Drink this, my poor friend. I had an idea that you might be needing it. The endurance of some animals is not quite what they claim it to be.” and he chuckled quietly to himself.

So it was that slow old Tortoise beat Hare at his own game. Clever as he was, Mofuli did not have the brains to see that he himself had at last been made a fool of.